

SPELLING BEE From Page 1C

sung and is exhilarating in its delivery. Castro has done this show twice before, having played both Chip and Coneybear, but he is so completely into this character that it seems as though he has been doing this role forever. His timing and facial expressions are spot on.

The minute she takes the stage, you know that Logainne Schwartz and Grubenierre (Anna Nicole Ventor) is politically aware. She wears many campaign buttons and often comments on political figures. It is clear that Ventor is improvising some of her lines, as some of the comments make reference to the recent Presidential debate or other current issues. Her portrayal of the youngest spelling bee contestant is earnest and perky. Logainne's two fathers (played by Miranda and Whitted, thinly disguised) appear to urge her on while they argue over how she needs to proceed. Ventor vents her stress in the song "Woe is Me" and has her finest moment when she rebels and gains a new respect for herself.

In her parochial school uniform, Marcy Park (Aubrie-Mei Rubel) is confident and alert, having placed ninth in last year's national spelling bee. She is an over-achiever who excels in sports, music (playing Chopin and Mozart on multiple instruments), and speaks six languages. Rubel's

execution of Marcy's song, "I Speak Six Languages" is extremely impressive as she sings while also doing a gymnastic routine that includes a slow split in front of the microphone and jumping rope without wavering a note. Choreographer Huffman lets her loose to allow her to make her best moves.



Spelling Bee moderator Rona Peretti (Beth Siegling) takes center stage.

Olivia Stanley Photo

cie later in the run. Stanley stepped in to do the same song in a matching parochial school uniform and with equal expertise, only she did her own best moves, which included a backbend and a kick over the microphone along with the split. No matter which of these two the audience sees, they will be astounded at the talent and versatility of the actress/dancer/singer.

And then there is Chip Tolentino (Kevin Illardi), the Boy Scout who is the returning champion of last year's Putnam County Spelling Bee. Chip is used to achieving and is socially adept. Illardi is hilarious in the role as he interacts with audience members, first in his charming and flirtatious personal comments, and then as an awkward moment of puberty arises (pun intended). His timing and facial expressions, his body language, his movement all add to the already comedic situation and audience members guffaw



Kevin Illardi, Sawyer Whitted, Anna Nicole Ventor, Sara Giacomini, Aubrie-Mei Rubel, and Juan Castro sing from the risers.

Olivia Stanley Photo

non-stop. The peak of his hilarity comes as he sings at the top of the second act while vending candy bars and packs of peanuts to the audience.

Illardi also makes a memorable cameo appearance in the second act, in which he is just as astoundingly good as he is as Chip.

The entire cast of this show are, each and all, wonderful. It is a dream cast. At any mo-

ment, though only one or two characters are featured, the facial and body reactions of the rest of the cast perfectly reflect their individual characters. This does not distract from, but, rather, adds to the humor or pathos of the situation. There are some tender, poignant moments to be had amid the comedy. It is impossible not to love each of these characters.

This year's season at the Grange Theatre is "Exploring Themes of Courage." Artistic Director Matthew Robert, in his Artistic Director's Note, writes: "The courage of these contestants shines as they confront their fears, embrace their individuality, and find strength in vulnerability." That is concisely it. That is what comes through all the humor to enrich us. That is why we love them

all. "The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee" is rated PG-13 due to adult language and content. There will be "kid-friendly" performances at the Sept. 21 and Sept. 28 matinees, with content adapted to ensure kid-friendly lyrics and dialogue. Performances run now through Sept. 29. Visit artistreevt.org for tickets and more information.

Mysteries and history on tap at NWPL

A wealth of creativity and knowledge will be on tap at the Norman Williams Public Library next week! We don't often schedule two big events back-to-back, but the opportunity to work with the Yankee Bookshop to co-host these three authors was too good to pass up.

On Tuesday at 6 p.m., two Upper Valley writers will talk about their newest mysteries.

Flynn Berry has just released "Trust Her," a thrilling sequel to "Northern Spy." These novels tell the story of the contem-



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porary IRA and life in a deeply divided society while offering a moving portrait of sister- and motherhood.

Sarah Stewart Taylor, whose Maggie D'arcy novels are set in contemporary Ireland, uses a changing and somewhat volatile Vermont in the 1960s as the backdrop for "Agony Hill." A young detective — a

newcomer to the small town — is tasked with determining whether a fatal fire was suicide or murder.

On Friday at 4 p.m., award-winning documentary filmmaker Sheila Curran Bernard will speak about her new book from Cambridge University Press, "Bring Judgment Day: Reclaiming Lead Bel-

ly's Truths from Jim Crow's Lies." She has written a stunning rebuttal of the mythology surrounding American music legend Lead Belly that reveals painful details about America's racial history.

Both events are free and open to the public — you don't need to be a patron to join us! Registration is appreciated but not required (visit NormanWilliams.org to sign up).

Liza Bernard, Programming and Marketing Librarian at Norman Williams Public Library in Woodstock.